

BENSON ANNOUNCES RESIGNATION

Eight years into Benson’s term, UTD begins search for sixth president

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
Editor-in-Chief

President Richard Benson sent out a schoolwide email Aug. 26 announcing the UT System has accepted his resignation and is beginning to look for a new president.

Benson, who became UTD’s fifth president in 2016, said in the email he expects the search to take “the better part of the 2025 academic year.” He will remain president until a successor is chosen and ready to begin their term and will remain a faculty member at UTD after stepping down. In a written statement to *The Mercury*, Benson said his advanced age played a major role in his decision to step down as president. Benson’s resignation comes in the wake of a year of political turmoil at UTD and numerous other American university presidents stepping down.

“I am 73, my health is good for a septuagenarian, and I have served for eight years,” Benson said. “I had specific goals when I arrived and I have accomplished those, although I certainly didn’t do it alone. I’ve had the support of a tremendous and talented community during my time at UTD.”

The 2023 American Council on Education’s survey of university presidents reported the average presidential term is 5.9 years, a stark decline from the averages for 2006 and 2016 of 8.5 and 6.5

years in office, respectively. Benson’s eight-year term exceeds the most recent national average yet it is the shortest term served by any UTD president. Benson’s announcement comes weeks after high-profile presidential resignations at Harvard, the University of Pennsylvania and most recently Columbia, where President Minouche Shafik resigned after criticism from both progressive and conservative voices within her institution

“I’ve had the support of a tremendous and talented community during my time at UTD.”

— Richard Benson

and across the nation — as well as resignations at local Texas universities like SMU and UNT.

“Perhaps the most notable [legacy I hope to leave] is ‘Putting the A into STEM to form STEAM,’” Benson said. “UTD has long been known as a

STEMM-focused university: Science, Technology, Engineering, Math and Management — we have two ‘M’s.”

Benson has presided over the rapid growth and development of the arts on campus, overseeing the creation of the School of Arts, Humanities and Technology in 2022 and the \$40 million donation from the Bass foundation in 2023. The first phase of the Athenaeum, planned and constructed during Benson’s presidency, is scheduled to open this September and will be home to the Crow Museum of Asian Art.

“The Crow Museum in particular is going to be hugely attractive to the region,” Benson said in a 2022 *Dallas Morning News* article. “We expect a lot of younger folks to come here on field trips. I joke that no one will ever come for a football game, but they will come for the arts.”

During Benson’s tenure as president, UTD went tobacco free in 2017, became an R1 research institution in 2018, celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2019 and

weathered the COVID-19 pandemic. Benson said in his written statement the pandemic was “a terrible, life-threatening disruption for all universities” and the most difficult period of his presidency.

“COVID was such a terrible threat, and every university had to find a path forward with few points of reference. The last pandemic of comparable threat was in 1918,” Benson said. “With hindsight, I think that UTD — the leadership came from many quarters — found an appropriate path forward. No doubt, sociologists will study these years, 2020 to 2022, for many years to come to better understand what worked well and what did not.”

Although the first half of Benson’s reign brought on positive change, the final years of Benson’s presidency were marked by conflicts with student activists and politics. In the spring 2023 semester, Student Government passed S.R. 2022-40, which called for UTD to divest its investments in five weapons manufacturing companies. Benson would publicly distance himself from this resolution by writing a letter which said that “UTD leadership does not share the same view as the student senate ... The resolution does not obligate UTD or the UT System to take any action.”

SEE **BENSON**, PAGE 4



ALEX LAWLESS | MERCURY STAFF

Lunar rover to the moon

Comet Aerobotics create lunar rover for NASA's Lunabotics Competition to help with Artemis mission

PAOLA MARTINEZ
Life & Arts

Comet Aerobotics, a new branch of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics at UTD, became the first UTD team to compete in NASA’s 2025 Lunabotics Competition by building a lunar rover that could help advance NASA’s Artemis moon mission.

The Comet Aerobotics branch currently has eight members who were all previously part of AIAA and its other branches before Abeni Belay, mechanical engineering senior and Comet Aerobotics director, recruited them. Belay proposed the new branch to the executive team of AIAA in spring 2024.

“I joined AIAA last year as a member of Rocketry, and because I [was] being introduced to aerospace, I got to learn about what the field really entails and how there’s so much more than just rockets, planes and research,” Belay said. “After being interested in rovers and satellites and how to use robotics to solve issues with space, I went ahead and decided to start Comet Aerobotics.”

Belay said she thought the annual NASA Lunabotics Competition would be the perfect first project for Comet Aerobotics. The competition challenges collegiate robotics teams to design and build an autonomous rover that must excavate regolith — or moon dirt — and transport it to a designated area, simulating an actual lunar rover mission. Belay said that NASA hopes to use students’ contributions to the competition for Artemis — their mission to put a man on the moon for the first time since the 1972 Apollo mission. Applications for the competition open Sept. 6 and the qualifying teams will be announced Sept. 20. The competition will be held May 22-25 at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

During summer break, amid internships and travel plans, the team designed and built a working prototype for the lunar rover’s base, which includes the axles and wheels. The prototype is a differential drive base with cylindrical wheels — two locked front wheels and

SEE **ROVER**, PAGE 3

First day floods at Capella Hall

As the school year begins, students are disappointed with UTD Housing’s response

MARIA SHAIKH
Managing Editor

The fourth floor of Capella Hall, formerly Residence Hall North, experienced significant flooding in a hallway and multiple dorm rooms Aug. 21 after a major valve broke during a water shutoff for a shower repair. A TikTok video posted by marketing freshman Livy Ker of her dorm and hallway flooding has accumulated over 2.3 million views as of Aug. 31.

Ker, along with her roommates marketing freshman Abril Nadal and business administration freshman Wendy Rubio were in their dorm for most of the flooding. Nadal said the flooding began around 4:20 p.m. and water was still in the room and hallways by 7:30 p.m. Ker said maintenance shut off the water supply to Capella’s fourth floor around 5 p.m. The floor was without water until around 11 p.m.. Nadal, who was in the dorm when the flooding started, said she let in the maintenance worker who began the shower repair that led to the broken valve.

“He came in for a work order I had put in about our lights not turning on,” Nadal said. “He had gone into the shower room and he was like, ‘oh, so this is the light that isn’t working.’ ...

He said, ‘oh, I think I’ve worked in this shower before.’ And I said, ‘yeah, you were supposed to fix our hot cold situation, but it’s still really hot.’ So, he just went in and fixed it. He didn’t even look at the lights ... and just started working [on the shower] ... I went back to my room and then eventually I

“I had to actually run through it and got my shoes all wet ... We all eventually got our shoes wet.”

— Wendy Rubio

just hear streams of water.”

Rubio, who was in Vega Hall — formerly Residence Hall Northwest — when the water valve broke, said she arrived at Capella’s fourth floor to water filling the hallway just a few minutes later.

“I was walking forward [on Capella’s fourth floor] and I just see these crew

people just running and [panicking],” Rubio said. “I guess I take a while to process things [so] I was like, okay, cool ... As I’m getting closer to the left turn, I hear all the water ... I had to actually run through it and got my shoes all wet ... We all eventually got our shoes wet.”

Ker, Rubio and Nadal said the intense flooding made them frantic — especially Nadal, whose bedroom was closest to the encroaching water. Rubio said she used a Swiffer and broom to push water out of her room to protect her belongings, and Nadal piled her belongings onto her bed and put a towel under her door. In Ker’s TikTok, maintenance workers can be seen vacuuming the water in the hallway; Rubio said they later left and Nadal took over vacuuming the water. Nadal said that when water started pouring out of their shower room, the maintenance worker disappeared for 20 minutes and returned with a second individual, and later a third, who attempted to fix the problem.

“I’m going back and forth, like, ‘Hey, what’s going on? What’s happening?’” Nadal said. “All they keep saying

SEE **HOUSING**, PAGE 4



PHOTOS BY LIVY KER | COURTESY

Left: Water flowing from a Capella Hall resident’s sink during the flooding period. Right: Residents of Capella Hall’s fourth floor make use of a Swiffer, vacuum and towel in an attempt to mitigate the water damage from flooding.



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Police Blotter

- Aug. 14

 - An individual stole a bike from the Andromeda Hall bike rack.
- Aug. 16

 - An individual stole a bike from the Capella Hall bike rack.
- Aug. 18

 - An individual stole property valued under \$100 in the Building 36 breezeway.
- Aug. 19

 - An individual stole a bike from the Bulding 29 UV bike rack.
- An individual stole property valued under \$100 in JSOM.
- An individual stole a bike from the Capella Hall bike rack.
- Aug. 20

 - An individual stole property valued between \$100 to \$750 from the FM building.
- An individual stole a bike from the Vega Hall bike rack.
- Aug. 21

 - An individual was arrested for public intoxication and for making a "terroristic threat" against a peace officer/judge in the Plinth.
- Aug. 22

 - An individual stole proptert valued between \$750 to \$2,500 in the Sceinces Building.
- An individual was charged for making a false statement to law enforcement in Lot J.
- Aug. 26

 - An individual failed to yield the right of way to an emergency vehicle and ran a red light at the Waterview Parkway Campbell Road intersection.
- Aug. 28

 - An individual did credit card fraud and theft of property in the Activity Center.

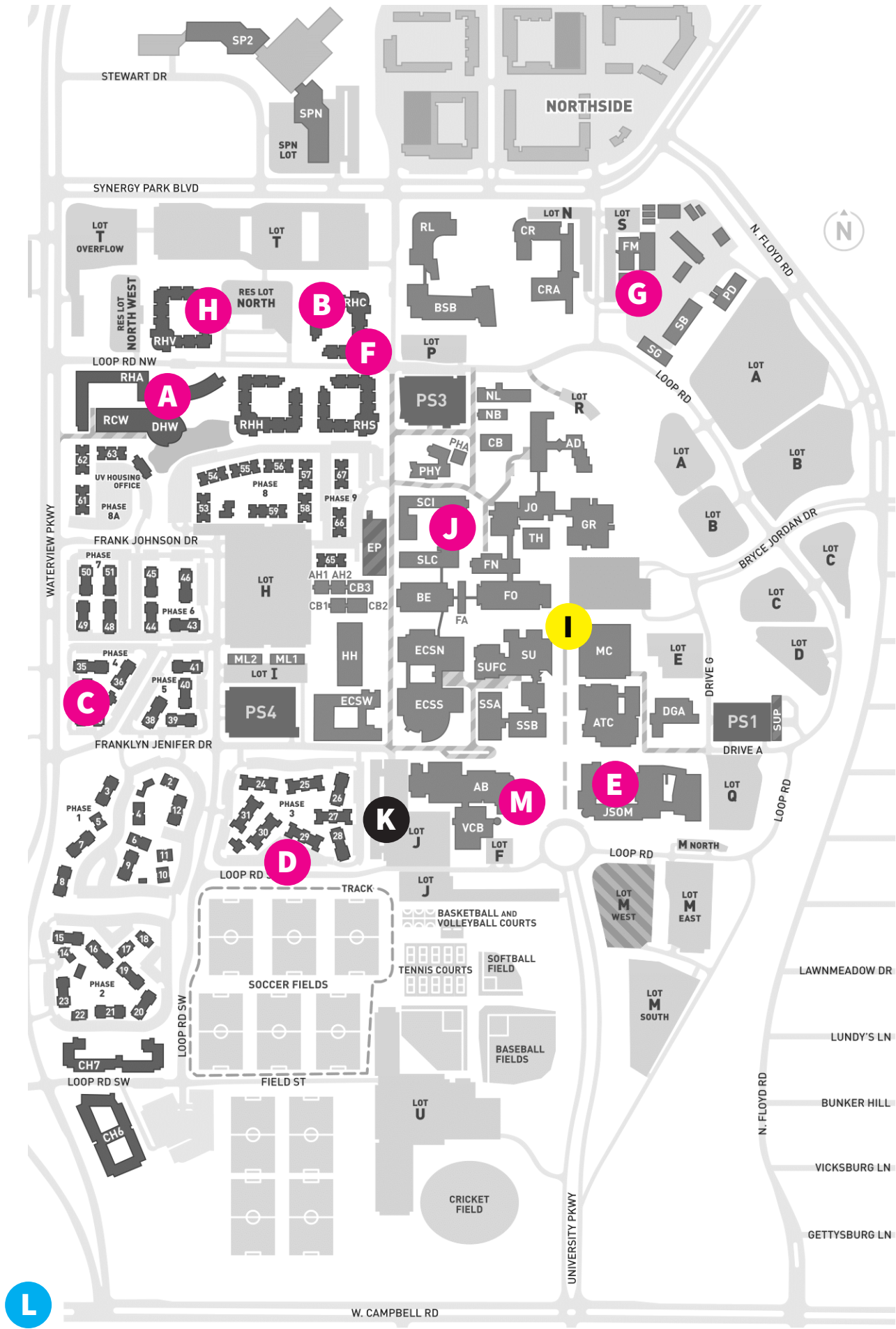
LEGEND

VEHICULAR INCIDENT

THEFT

DRUGS & ALCOHOL

OTHER



From The Mercury Archives: Star Wars Part 1

SDI funds UTD laser research, Sept. 8, 1986

Dr. Carl B. Collins, Jr., physics professor at UTD, was awarded a \$1.8 million contract to cover the last five months of 1986 by the innovative Science and Technology Directorate of the Strategic Defense Initiative Program. The money will accelerate unclassified research Collins has underway on the feasibility of developing a gamma-ray laser.

The contract gives UTD the leading role in an SDI project to develop the gamma-ray laser and funds accelerated development and greater use of two image devices developed by Collins and his colleagues in the university's Center for Quantum Electronics: a flash X-ray source and a Nuclear Raman Spectrometer. Both devices enable testing of elements which might produce gamma rays that could be focused and directed in the form of a laser beam.

"We've known for some time that, in theory, a gamma-ray laser is possible," Collins said. "But what we have to do to determine whether it can be constructed."

A gamma-ray laser would release and harness immense energies from within the nucleus of the atom, going a step further than conventional lasers, which tap the atom's edge.

The gamma-ray laser could have industrial and other non-defense applications as well as strategic defense implications for SDI, commonly known as "Star Wars."

Although it could not be used as a weapon against or on Earth because the rays would disperse going through the atmosphere, its beam could be well-focused and directed in the vacuum of space and would be an effective space defense device.

The flash X-ray source already developed the capability of producing so many X-ray photographs in such a short time that it could provide the nearest thing to an internal movie of damaged body joints in action.

UTD has applied for a patent on the flash X-ray source. Dr. David Dunn, dean of the School Natural Sciences and Mathematics, said,

"If we're granted the patent, we would hope to be able to license other parties to make such appropriate applications to the technique."

The total amount of the contract is expected to exceed \$10 million before the completion of the project at the end of 1988. Collins, a native Texan, received the B.S. with high honors in physics, the M.A. and Ph.D. in physics from the University of Texas at Austin in 1960, 1961 and 1963, he joined the Southwest Center for Advanced Studies, which was incorporated into UTD in 1969. He founded the Center for Quantum Electronics at UTD in 1975.

Letter to the Editor: "Blood Money," Sept. 22, 1986

To the Editor:

What do those "scientists" do over in Founders, Berkner and the Center for Quantum Electronics? The time has come when we must find out, we must begin to care about our fragile planet and take a stand on whether we will live or die.

On July 15, 1945, the first atomic bomb, Trinity, was detonated in New Mexico. Watchdog scientists were betting how powerful it would be, and they were not disappointed. Some of the scientists cheered wildly with extreme pride and joy. Others realized for the first time that they had launched a demon technology that could threaten the survival of the human race. J. Robert Oppenheimer, the lead scientist for the project, recalled lines from The Bhagavad Gita, upon realizing what he had contributed to: "I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds."

Following the Hiroshima-Nagasaki bombs, many U.S. scientists tried to convince our political and scientific "leaders" that atomic bombs must never be built nor ever used again. But the bomb became the new toy, the new idol to be played with and stroked. The greed of U.S. business to make profit on "peaceful atoms," and the fictitious paranoia over communist spies drummed up by Richard Nixon, Joseph McCarthy and the entrenched elite helped create an era of ignorance and hypocrisy in the '50s and '60s.

I hope that Mr.Collins, who is receiving millions of dollars for

Star Wars research, is not a dupe of the forces that have helped create the 11,572 nuclear warheads possessed by the U.S.; and the 9,458 total nuclear warheads possessed by the USSR. I hope that Mr.Collins will seriously consider returning the \$2 million in government "blood money" and instead ask for a contract that helps solve the world hunger and unemployment problems.

Reggie Regrut
Undergraduate
Student Government

Undergrads pioneer UTD’s first law review

AIMEE MORGAN
News Editor

MARIA SHAIKH
Managing Editor

From welcoming a new pre-law director to debuting a new legal curriculum for literature students, UTD’s pre-law programs have kicked into high gear over the past year — the latest addition being the university’s first-ever undergraduate law review. The journal, student-run and organized, launched fall 2024. It aims to provide students across all degree paths an opportunity to publish academically, hone their research skills and contribute to the legal field.

A law review is a scholarly journal, often run by a university, where contributors submit analyses on current issues and emerging subjects in law. Finance and accounting seniors Zachary Thomas and Jawad Karim and CITS senior Nithya Eluri co-founded the review and serve as president, editor-in-chief and vice president of administration of the review, respectively. Thomas said other students have previously attempted to create an undergraduate law review, but the amount of work necessary to create one led many to give up before its inception.

“There are two reasons why I started [the review],” Thomas said. “The first reason is I got to participate in the Archer Fellowship at UTD ... During this internship, I fell in love with the research aspect of [law], so I wanted to instill that in JSOM specifically, but then I realized we have an amazing pre-law department. But we didn’t have an undergraduate law review. I wanted to create something where students can learn how to research and write. The second reason is I wanted to develop our pre-law program — I wanted to give students the opportunity to learn skills they will need to get into law school.”

Thomas said he proposed his idea earlier this year during the spring semester to professor and program head of the literature department Charles Hatfield, who was introducing a new course on legal research and writing. Thomas thought the course could be extremely helpful in guiding potential law review writers. Throughout the summer, Thomas and 19 other law review board members worked together to create a curriculum for the course and plan accordingly for the fall semester. Thomas said he eventually wants to match UTD’s law review with the prestigious reviews of Columbia, Virginia and Harvard University.

“How well the students write, how [good] our publication ends up being is going to be a direct reflection of how well we can teach these students,” Thomas said.

The review allows students from any academic discipline to make submissions. Thomas said he encouraged his pre-med friends struggling to secure research

SEE REVIEW, PAGE 4

Fighting pain through bacteria

Gut, Brain, Pain Lab researchers explore how the gut microbiome can help alleviate sickle cell pain

ALISHA AGGARWAL
Mercury Staff

The Gut, Brain, Pain Lab, an on-campus research lab, is tackling the problem of treating chronic pain without relying on addictive substances like opioids.

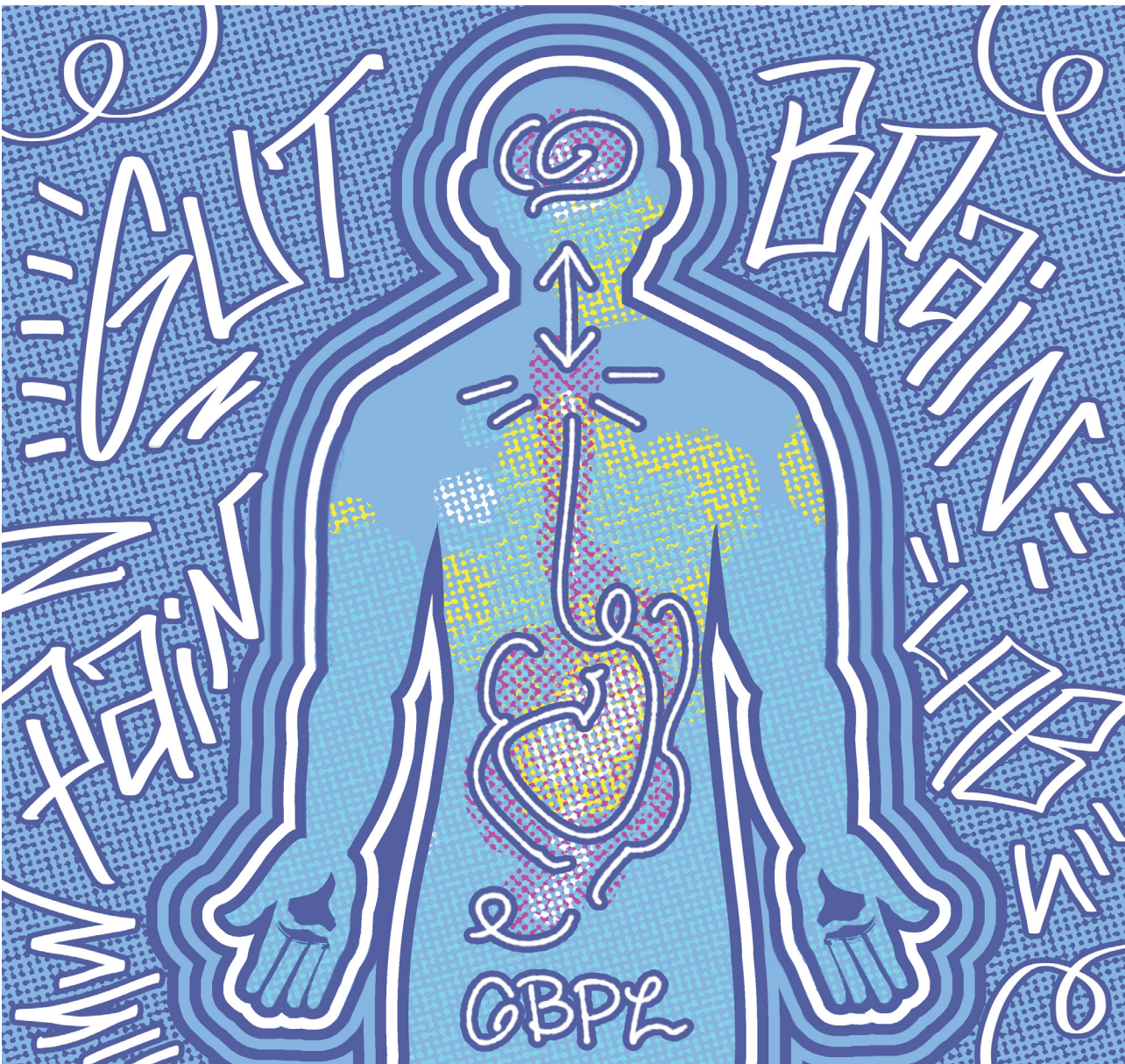
The lab, run by BBS professor Kate Sadler and staffed by eight undergraduate, graduate-level and Ph.D. researchers specifically works to address the pain caused by sickle cell anemia — a disease that causes red blood cells to become crescent-shaped, blocking blood flow and leading to pain. Members of the lab have dedicated several hours toward identifying pain treatments other than the opioids typically used to treat sickle cell pain. Juanna John, a neuroscience sophomore and undergraduate researcher at the lab, said the brain can perceive pain differently if the gut microbiome — the specific ecosystem of bacteria inside an individual’s gastrointestinal tract — is altered.

“I think what we are researching is very useful since chronic pain is becoming more and more prevalent, so it is important to see how the gut microbiome can alter that pain perception,” John said.

John said the main issue patients face with sickle cell anemia is chronic pain, but the traditional methods of combating this pain — opioids and other painkillers — can lead to addiction. John said a new solution made from another chemical compound needs to be found so patients can receive relief while avoiding the risks of drug addiction.

John, who joined the lab last year through the Clark Summer Research Program, said she enjoys the different processes and techniques she gets to utilize in her research — ranging from tests on live mice to staining brain tissue to DNA extraction. Salma Ash-shareef, a neuroscience Ph.D. student, said working at the lab has given her new skills and opportunities for her career pursuits.

“Working in the lab is a lot of fun,” neuroscience junior Divya Arivalagan said. “I get



ANIKA SULTANA | GRAPHICS EDITOR

to do cool science while applying knowledge that I learned from my coursework, and it’s amazing that I can contribute to research that will help so many people in the future.”

John and Arivalagan both said the lab’s atmosphere is welcoming, providing a supportive environment and great connections.

“A typical day in the lab can vary,” John said. “Over the summer, I was doing a lot of experiments like DNA extraction and pain behavior tests. But I also spent a lot of time analyzing the data I collected and reading through papers.”

John said her lab experience helped her

dive deeper into the world of lab research and make meaningful progress toward a treatment that could help people across the world.

“Everyone in my lab is very open,” John said. “It is truly a safe space to discuss not just science but your day-to-day life outside of academics as well.”

ROVER
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

motors on the two back wheels, making it steer like a tank.

Joseph Amador, mechanical engineering sophomore and chief engineer of Comet Aerobotics, said his previous experience in the high school-level FIRST Robotics Competition led the team to design the rover from the wheels up.

“I retrofitted an electric skateboard with a mount that would allow us to test different wheel designs, because the mechanical [team] had decided that the simplest place to start would be wheels since that doesn’t change,” Amador said. “We know that we’re going to need wheels for the robot.”

Adding onto Amador’s prior knowledge, William Haga and Sasha Luich, both mechanical engineering seniors and Comet Aerobotics mechanical co-leads, spent their summer break researching and reaching out to other universities like Purdue, Ohio State and Lone Star College to prepare for the competition.

“Will [and I] wanted to understand what we, [the team], were getting ourselves into,” Luich said. “We read last year’s rulebook and did a complete dissection of that and presented that to the rest of the club. We went through all the videos -- we actually found

this one project [with a] complete description of the rover — electrical, mechanical, embedded. And we had a movie night with all of our members and watched it and talked about it. So, before we really started building our own stuff, we saw what was already out there, what worked, what didn’t work.”

Although the team has made great progress with a drive base prototype, Haga foresees complications in building and designing the rover’s excavator, the part that digs and picks up regolith. Luich said that the depositor, the part where the rover will deposit the regolith to be transported, will also challenge the team.

“The excavator is a particular problem because we’re not digging up sand, we’re not digging up dirt,” Haga said. “We’re digging up regolith and it’s a hard thing for us to simulate, especially as a first-year team. We’ve never once [gone] to the actual competition and seen the field, get a feel for its consistency and what you’re dealing with ... We have to rely on the experience of other teams and the videos that we’ve seen.”

Besides qualifying for and placing in the competition, Belay said she hopes Comet Aerobotics’ members will build useful and practical skills needed in professional engineering fields. Luich said she hopes to gain recognition from UTD

and NASA for their work and ensure that Comet Robotics continues to expand and grow; Haga said that this is not a one-year team.

“The biggest takeaway is to prove to ourselves that we can do this,” said Anbarin Khalid, biomedical engineering senior and

outreach lead of Comet Aerobotics. “And we really want to do a good job at leaving behind a legacy, so this creates a space for other robotics enthusiasts who come together and pursue other competitions, and [have] an impact, not only within UT Dallas, but also the community around us.”



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UTD SPORTS SCHEDULE


AWAY

HOME




VOLLEYBALL

SEPT. 5 at Southwestern (6:30 p.m.)
SEPT. 6 vs. Whitman (11:00 a.m.)
SEPT. 6 at Concordia Texas (6:00 p.m.)
SEPT. 7 vs. Texas Lutheran (10:00 a.m.)
SEPT. 17 vs. Centenary (6:00 p.m.)
SEPT. 20 vs. Howard Payne (6:00 p.m.)




WOMEN'S TENNIS

SEPT. 6 to SEPT. 8 at Collin College Tournament
SEPT. 13 to SEPT. 15 at Marty Berryman Invitational
SEPT. 19 to SEPT. 21 at ITA Division II South Central Regional



MEN'S TENNIS

SEPT. 6 to SEPT. 8 at Collin College Tournament
SEPT. 13 to SEPT. 15 at Marty Berryman Invitational
SEPT. 26 to SEPT. 28 at ITA Division II South Central Regional



CROSS COUNTRY

SEPT. 7 at Gerald Richey UTA Invitational
SEPT. 20 at Southern Stampede (MO)
SEPT. 28 at Cowboy Jamboree (OK)
OCT. 5 at DBU Old Glory Gallop
OCT. 18 at Arturo Barrios Invitational

PHOTOS BY UTD ATHLETICS | COURTESY

Spikes in western racism are affecting everyone, even UTD students

Students on campus share their experiences with marginalization, discrimination and public narratives about people of color

AYSHA BADER
Mercury Staff

As anti-immigration and anti-Muslim riots erupted in the UK and hate against Black and Arab individuals escalate in the U.S., UTD students speak about their experience with marginalization.

ABC reported that after false information about the suspect in a stabbing spree being an “Islamist migrant” spread online and resulted in anti-immigration riots, Nura, a mother who fled Sudan to the UK with her children, said she felt like she was reliving all that she went through.

CNN reported July 6 that Sonya Massey, a Black Illinois woman who called police to report a suspected intruder, was shot in her home by the officer who responded.

On Oct. 14, soon after anti-Arab and anti-Muslim rhetoric began spreading in media outlets like news and talk radio, Wadea-al-Fayoume, a six-year-old Palestinian boy, was stabbed to death in his Chicago home by his landlord.

In a 2023 report, the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights said

that “since 2015, reported hate crimes have nearly doubled [in the U.S.],” and that “the most recent outbreak of violence in the Middle East has created a climate of increased hate targeting Arab, Jewish and Muslim Americans.” Omolere Aliu, neuroscience junior and president of the African Student Union, said non-Black people make assumptions about her pursuing a degree in medicine as Nigerian American. Aliu said that people are regularly surprised that she could be pursuing a field like neuroscience.

“Whenever I would talk about my degree ... you could almost see the light in their eyes shine like, ‘Oh I was wrong,’” Aliu said. “I could see that this discriminatory notion did not come ... genuinely [from them.] This came from some sort of outside source.”

Aliu said her experience with people

assuming less of her simply because of who she is, is not uncommon. According to PEW Research Center, 63% of Black people feel as though media representation and public perception of them is more often negative than positive, and 43% of Black people feel stereotyped by news media. Other marginalized groups similarly suffer from negative coverage; Abdullah Chaudhry, engineering senior and president of the Pakistani Student Association, said he felt impacted by narratives about Muslims, Arabs and South Asians perpetuated in the media since 9/11.

“At the airports, I always get checked ... separately,” Chaudhry said. “I’ve been to the same airport a thousand times and ... I always get checked extra ... because of my name, my identity, my skin color.”

Chaudhry’s experience is shared by



AASHIKA KISHORE | MERCURY STAFF

many and is relevant to the media’s common media narratives pushed about Desi, Arab and Muslim people since 9/11. In a study conducted by TRT World on Muslim representation in American films, it was found that quotes addressing Muslim characters mostly exhibited themes of telling them to return to their countries or learn English, even calling them “terrorists.” The prevalence of hateful narratives about Muslims can worsen or legitimize

hate. Students expressed that media outlets misrepresenting people of color and the public perpetuating inaccurate and harmful stereotypes play into the way people of color are treated and lead to discrimination and hate crimes.

Aliu said that although discrimination persists, hope can be found in genuine curiosity for knowledge about others.

“It comes with ... understanding and empathy,” Aliu said. “Take the steps to gain education and ask.”

Corrections and clarifications

The Mercury Volume XIX, No. 1, published August 19, 2024:

The article “A bee in our bonnets: UTD’s journey to sustainable living” incorrectly stated which location Chandu Garapaty said had poor sidewalk maintenance. Garapaty said sidewalks in the DART service area are often poorly maintained. The article’s accompanying graphic includes a quote from Garapaty that was not attributed. The graphic also incorrectly states how much of UTD’s energy consumption comes from nonrenewable sources; the correct figure is 64%.

The article “The Paisleys: from breakup to breakout” incorrectly stated Sasha Kaplan’s first electric guitar. It is a Les Paul by Epiphone. The article also had a typo in its headline on the website, utdmercury.com.

BENSON
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Fall 2023 saw an increase in protest activity on campus as students continued to demonstrate in favor of divestment. In November 2023, UTD administration removed the Spirit Rocks in response to students using them for pro-Palestine and pro-Israel political expression; the Spirit Rocks had served as a platformed student expression and political slogans since their installation in 2008 by the Office of Student Affairs.

Students continued protesting UTD’s administrative decisions through the first student sit-in at the Administration Building in April 2024 and the first state trooper raid of a student protest in UTD history on May 1, resulting in the arrest of nine students, three faculty and nine community members. In the May 22 meeting

of UTD’s Academic Senate, Benson said that he “wanted to see how it plays out” regarding UTD’s ongoing legal and academic cases against the arrested students and faculty.

The UT System Regents’ Rules and Regulations outline the specific process by which the next president will be chosen in Rule 20201: Presidents. An advisory committee will be created and tasked with reviewing potential candidates and recommending up to 10 candidates for the UT Board of Regents to make a final decision on. If the regents find the recommended candidates to be unsatisfactory, then a new advisory committee may be formed, or the regents can choose someone at their own discretion. The advisory committee is composed of at least 13 members, which will include three faculty members, one staff member, one dean, the president of the UTD Alumni Association and one student.

REVIEW
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

opportunities to write about policy relevant to their career, so they can get published and use their publication as leverage for more opportunities. Eluri said that while the review prioritizes a legal aspect in all its published papers, the team behind it hopes to attract a wide variety of students, interests and topics. Karim said that the review aims to publish on a semesterly basis with the goal of publishing in spring 2025.

“Our goal is to keep everything interdisciplinary — educating and motivating students across UTD regardless of their career interests or background,” Eluri said. “We want them to come and join us, write for us, [and] bring us their insight.”

Thomas said he encourages students to actively keep up with the review even if they do not plan to submit anything, so they can stay informed about current issues and policy matters relevant to their careers and fields of

study. Karim said he recommends students interested in the review to start reading legal cases, and if they encounter a difficult topic or gap in knowledge, the team behind the review will assist them in understanding.

“We want this to be accessible to anyone, anyone can join and write something,” Karim said. “Running an organization and being able to engage people with really complicated topics and challenging tasks, I think that’s probably the most important thing I will take from this experience.”

For students wanting to get involved with the law review, Thomas said to express interest and be active with the organization. The UTD undergraduate law review website is under construction; the organization can currently be contacted on Instagram at @UTDULR.

“No matter what your major is, what your background is, what your interests are, you can find a place in the law review,” Thomas said. “You have the ability to make whatever you want out of it.”

HOUSING
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

is everything’s fine. ‘Don’t worry, everything’s fine. We’ll get it fixed, everything’s fine.’ And I’m like, okay, that is so sketchy.”

While the flooding did not cause significant damage to personal property, Ker said she is worried about mold growing because the dorm’s doors and furniture have water damage on the bottom and the suite has a humid smell. Nadal said she emailed Housing and have not received a response. A spokesperson from UTD Housing told *The Mercury* in an email that flooding issues in residence halls are typically one-off anomalies or caused by freezing temperatures. The spokesperson said no students have “reported any damage or lasting issues due to the water intrusion,” and that Housing will investigate any such reports and assist affected students if needed.

“During a water shutoff for a shower re-

pair, a major valve broke in the fourth floor ceiling that caused the flooding to occur,” the Housing spokesperson said. “Water to the building was immediately shut off and a plumber was onsite within 30 minutes to complete the repair to the major valve.”

The spokesperson for Housing said that no damage was reported at the time of flooding, and that the affected suites are being monitored. The spokesperson said that Housing will investigate and provide assistance to impacted students as needed in situations like that of the Aug. 19 flooding.

“[I am] disappointed with how Housing has been with us because you can imagine three little girls panicking,” Rubio said. “If it wasn’t for us literally pushing the water out ourselves — ‘cause we had to push it into the drain of the shower, that was all literally us for a good hour or more pushing water all [by] ourselves ... Anything would help from Housing but they have not responded. They

have not reached out and it’s very disappointing.”

Capella’s flooding is one of numerous recent issues students have reported with on-campus housing providing inadequate maintenance. Brendan Smith, a computer science senior, has lived in his Phase 5 University Village apartment for four years, during which the air conditioning broke twice — once two years ago, once this summer — and caused the indoor temperature to exceed 90 degrees Fahrenheit both times. Smith said Housing took a week and a half before fixing the AC the first time. For the most recent break, Smith said Housing installed temporary AC units a few days after he and his roommate filed work orders, and a few days after the temporary units’ installation, a maintenance worker fixed the main AC.

“The first time around kind of sucked and I didn’t really understand how long it’d be, but this time they gave a rough timeline,”

Smith said. “They said within a week, which still doesn’t really narrow much down, but it’s better than not having said anything at all. I wish they would improve on the timing of things, because to install those window units to temporarily alleviate the problem [took] maybe five minutes. [The] maintenance guy just walked in, put it in, plugged it in and left. So they could have done that at any point in the day ... it being 90, 95 degrees seems a bit more important of an issue to take care of.”

ATEC sophomore Oziah Benard said that upon moving into his Phase 7 UV apartment Aug. 17, he and his mother discovered black mold growing out of the vents. Because of the interconnected vent system, Benard said he believes other Phase 7 apartments are also experiencing mold growth. After reporting the issue to the UV Housing Office, Benard said a maintenance worker arrived later that day and cleaned the vent cover, but did not touch the inside of the vent.

“[My mother] looked at me and was like, ‘He’s gonna try and tell us that’s just dirt. It’s not dirt. That’s mold,’” Benard said. “And [the maintenance worker] comes in and sure enough he’s like, ‘Yeah, it’s just dirt, it’s not mold, don’t worry,’ and he puts [the vent cover] back. Nothing inside was cleaned at all. So if you look in the vents, it’s still just as black. He was putting on the vent cover and my mom turned to me and was like, ‘When it grows back, let me know.’”

A spokesperson from Housing told *The Mercury* in an email that when addressing malfunctioning air conditioning, Housing installs temporary AC units “when possible” and relocates students until repairs are complete “in some cases.” The spokesperson said if a student reports mold or similar growth in their units, Housing will determine the cause, clean the growth and take steps like repairing or removing pieces of walls and relocating the student to a different unit.



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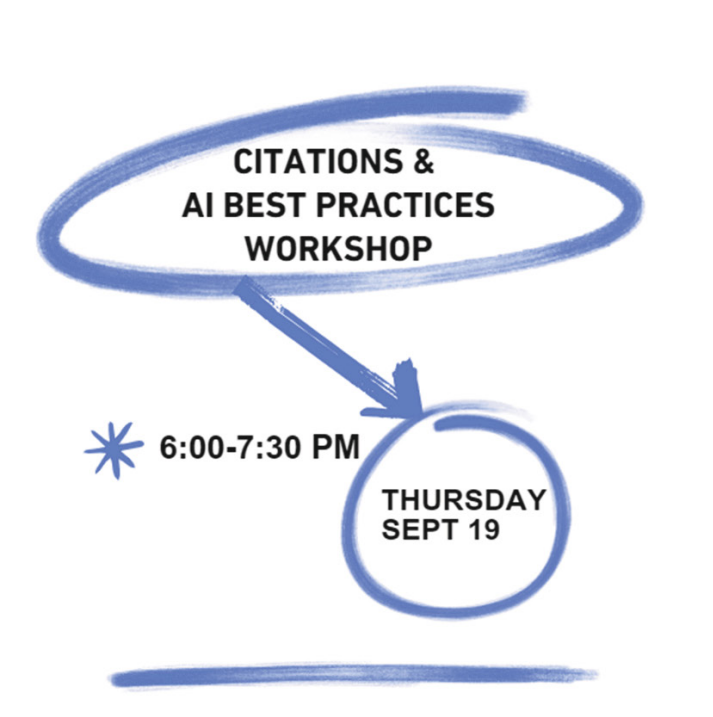
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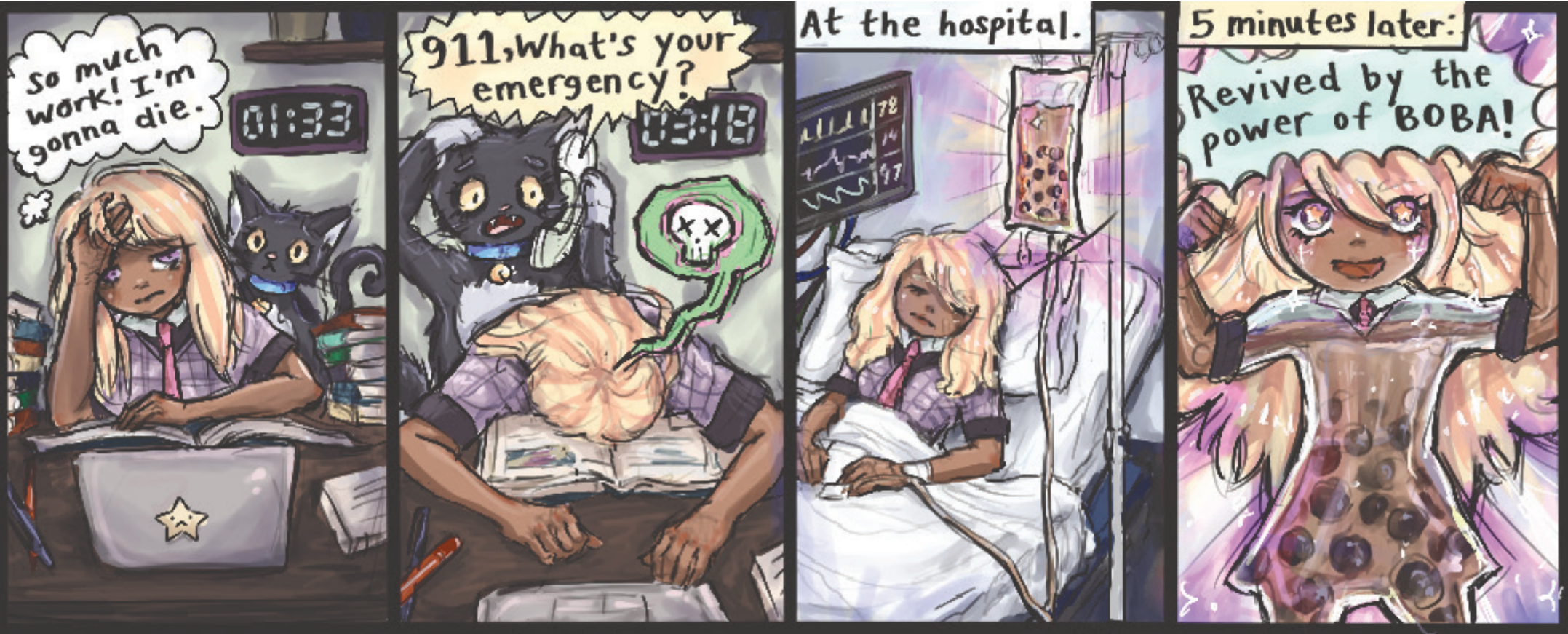
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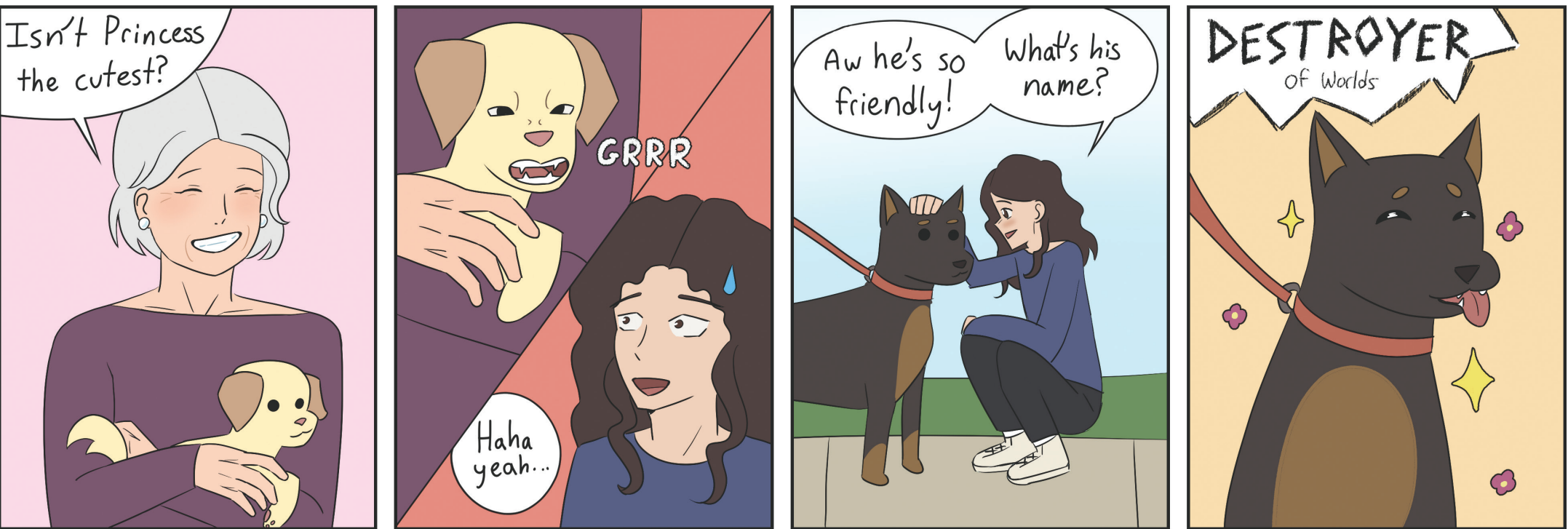
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THE DUALITY OF DOGS



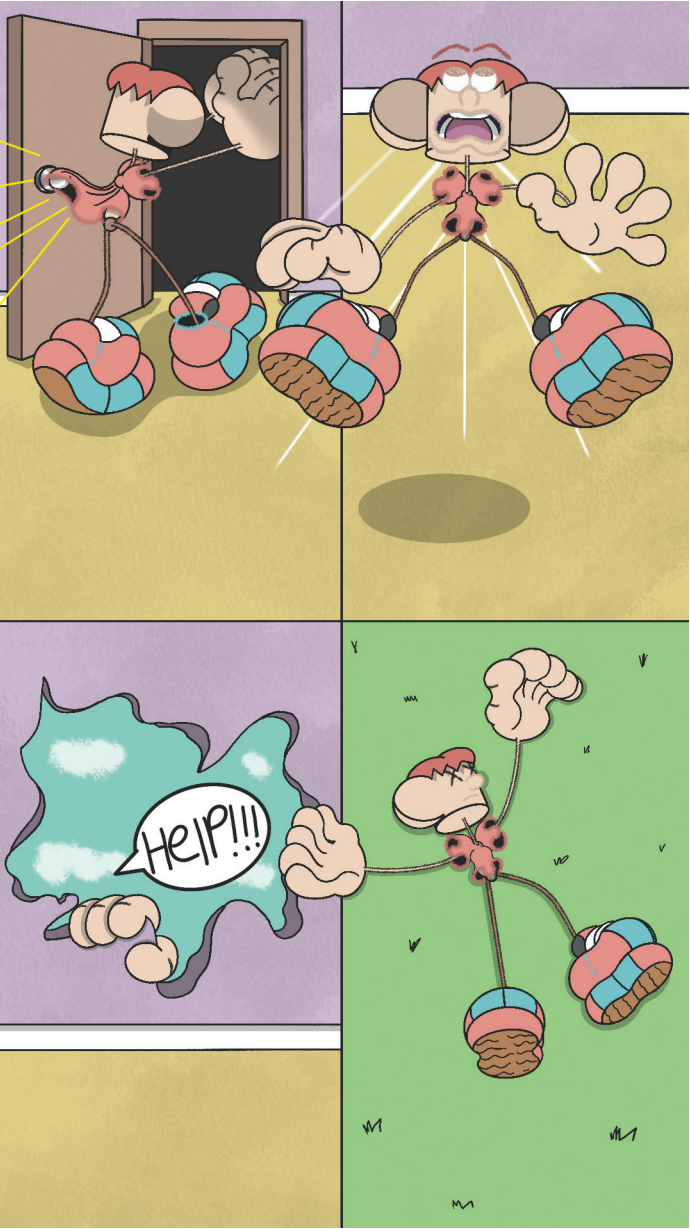
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DEARLY BELOVED



MADABUCHI OKORO | MERCURY STAFF

DIY SLINGSHOT



JOSHUA DAVIDSON | MERCURY STAFF

"The Punchline Is..." key

I	D	A	H	O	P	O	T	A	T	O	A	U
T	O	N	O	F	B	R	I	C	K	S	C	M
M	O	U	N	T	A	I	N	T	O	P	A	O
E	M	T			N	O	N	S		R	O	C
			F	D	N	Y		R	E	D	I	A
S	G	T	M	A	J			P	A	Y	D	A
O	O	R	A	H		M	O	R	N			
P	O	U	N	D	O	F	F	E	A	T	H	E
					P	R	A	Y		P	A	R
S	E	S	A	M	E	S		R	E	D	O	S
E	M	I	L	Y			D	R	E	D		
A	I	M	E	R		T	R	E	S		D	B
G	L	I		R	E	S	I	D	E	N	T	I
A	I	L			H	E	A	V	Y			
L	E	E			S	C	R	E	E	N	T	E

08.19 Sudoku key

1	2	3	4	8	5	7	9	6
6	5	4	1	7	9	8	2	3
8	7	9	6	2	3	1	4	5
2	3	1	9	5	4	6	8	7
4	9	8	7	6	1	3	5	2
7	6	5	8	3	2	9	1	4
3	4	6	2	1	8	5	7	9
5	1	2	3	9	7	4	6	8
9	8	7	5	4	6	2	3	1

STUDENT ART SHOWCASE: IS PINATA



ERIN GUTSCHKE | MERCURY STAFF

SUPPRESSED FEELINGS



			C									
14	U		H									
17	P	R	AIR	I	E	D	O	G				

NOTE: Rebus crosswords are puzzles where one or more squares contains more than one letter, as opposed to a regular crossword where there is only one letter per square. In this example puzzle, [AIR] is the rebus and the clues read as PR[AIR]IEDOG and CH[AIR].

1	2	3				4	5	6	7
8				9	10				
11			12						
		13							
		14							
15	16					17		18	19
20						21			
22			23	24	25	26			
	27								
			28						

- Down**
- 1 "Much ___ About Nothing"
 - 2 With 8-across, "Two Trucks" artist
 - 3 Disliked entry form?
 - 4 One paramount at Paramount, informally?
 - 5 More good-looking
 - 6 Sch. at the center of the Varsity Blues scandal
 - 7 One of two pronouns for a chocolate bar
 - 9 Apt rhyme of "nude" and "crude"
 - 10 Pick it out!
 - 12 Cancerous Green?
 - 15 Actress Ryan of "When Harry Met Sally"
 - 16 ___ gobi (curry dish)
 - 18 Author Snicket of "A Series of Unfortunate Events"
 - 19 Short trip?
 - 23 Brings down the house?
 - 24 To and ___
 - 25 One who makes the calls, shortly
 - 26 "The Addams Family" cousin

- Across**
- 1 Boxer known as "The Greatest"
 - 4 Ergo
 - 8 See 2-down
 - 9 Armenian flatbread
 - 11 Not yet decided
 - 13 Common early 2000s refrain online ... or a hint to three of the squares in this puzzle
 - 14 Reverses
 - 15 Halloween or hospital couture
 - 17 Part of a univ.
 - 20 Cotton gin inventor Whitney
 - 21 Interoffice notes
 - 22 Reliable company
 - 27 "Let me give it another shot"
 - 28 Cushiony



Use this space to write down notes or work through sudoku.

09.03 Sudoku

5	2			3		9		
					1			
					4		7	
	7						4	2
	1	4	3			7		
	3							
8	9	7				2		
			1		7			5
			2		9			

student art showcase

Send your art to graphics@utdmercury.com to be featured



HUMANIZING HOMELESS PEOPLE:
DOES AWARENESS REALLY MATTER?

PHOTO BY ALEX LAWLESS | MERCURY STAFF
PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY ANIKA SULTANA | GRAPHICS EDITOR

◀ Pictured: Collage of cardboard signs bought from the local homeless population by Southern Methodist University professor Willie Baronet.

AIYANA NEWCOMB
Mercury Staff

“Humanizing the Homeless” is an art exhibit showcasing close-up portraits of the homeless community curated by Canada-based artist Leah den Bok, Associate Dean of the Arts Jonathan Palant and Southern Methodist University professor Willie Baronet, which aims to emphasize unhoused people’s humanity in a society that frequently disregards it.

“I certainly shared the common opinion that homelessness is caused by addiction and laziness,” Palant said. “We think of veterans and we think of people of color and we think of smell, [and] all these stereotypes. And I think that what I’ve learned is that any one of us can fall on hard times.”

The exhibit displays cardboard signs once used by unhoused people with

messages such as, “Homeless. Hungry. Please Help. God Bless.” The exhibit is located in the ATEC building and ran from Aug. 19 to Sept. 3. The Dallas Street Choir, a choir made entirely of unhoused people, will perform as part of the exhibit Sept. 5.

“It’s a beautiful title for a project because that’s exactly [what] it is,” Palant said. “The unhoused ... are viewed as subhuman or inhuman or inhumane, and what Willie and Leah and members of the street choir are doing is bringing them [together], making [a] community, making the world more aware of the humanness of these individuals.”

Palant’s, as well as Baronet’s and Bok’s, emphasis on recognizing the humanity of unhoused people creates a

broader message about seeing and acknowledging the homeless community. Not seeking to gawk at the lives of the unhoused, “Humanizing the Homeless” shares real stories from people living on the streets. Additionally, the profits earned from Bok’s “Nowhere to Call Home” books, made entirely of the portraits she displays in the exhibit, are donated to Salvation Army.

“Invisible people are expected to be silent people,” Palant said. “We strive to be visible. We strive to be heard. We strive to make a point that our housing situation doesn’t define us any more than having blue eyes.”

Palant said that when the Dallas Street Choir performs and the audience cries, it’s not out of pity or sadness but out of realization. He said people cry because they are truly seeing a largely

ignored group and understanding their integrity.

“We pretend that we don’t see the unhoused,” Palant said. “We cross the street to avoid them. We close our windows and look the other way. We lock our [car] doors at red lights. And when the street choir sings, everybody listens. And they see the very people that were invisible to them outside the performance space.”

Shreya Ravi, a neuroscience and psychology sophomore, said visibility can improve the lives of the unhoused, having worked directly with homeless people as vice president of Hearts for the Homeless, a student organization that provides unhoused people with health care and emotional support.

“More than just donating and helping, it’s being aware that there are people that go through that and not turning a blind eye to them,” Ravi said.

“I feel like it’s so important because people don’t want to acknowledge that people are in that situation ... it’s so important to know that there’s not just one or two of them — there’s hundreds of them and it’s our job to help them.”

Ravi said that in her work for Hearts for the Homeless, listening to people who have lived on the streets and treating them with the same dignity afforded to housed people is just as valuable as the health information Hearts for the Homeless is providing.

“They’re people too, worthy of respect, worthy of attention, worthy of love,” Palant said. “We shouldn’t approach the unhoused community [with] fear first.”

Cosplaying on a college budget

Tips from Comet Cosplay leaders on how to enjoy the art of cosplay while staying on a tight budget

AIYANA NEWCOMB
Mercury Staff

Anime, TV show and video game enthusiasts are no strangers to cosplay — the art of dressing up as a beloved fictional character. But while countless fans dream of cosplaying at a fan convention or for a photoshoot, getting started, especially when in college, can be daunting and expensive.

Comet Cosplay held its fall cosplay kickoff Aug. 26, welcoming both old and new cosplayers to the club. Comet Cosplay seeks to create a thriving cosplay community where members make friends and help each other with ideas, costumes, workshops and events. Physics senior and president of Comet Cosplay, Lauren Mangu, and club secretary and animation and games junior, Vinh Mac, have found budget-friendly ways to help new members create their cosplays.

“The thing is that like any other hobby, cosplay does cost money,” Mac said. “And while there is this whole thing around it about ‘Like, wow, this is really expensive,’ ... it doesn’t have to be.”

No matter how simple, thrown together, cheap or “scuffed,” as Mac said, the cosplays might be, the focus for Mac and Mangu is about how the cosplay makes its wearer feel.

“My first cosplay was [at] my high school graduation because I was way too enthusiastic [about] cosplaying,” Mangu said. “So I cosplayed as Yumeko Jabami from ‘Kakegurui’ to graduation, and regardless of how official and formal the event was, I felt so comfortable and excited to be in cosplay of a character from a show that I really liked.”

Early on in their cosplaying careers, both Mac and Mangu practiced one of the easiest and most accessible forms

of cosplay: closet cosplay, which uses clothes already in the cosplayer’s closet or thrifted for cheap. Mac said that no matter how simple the clothes are, portraying key features of a character is all that is necessary for people to recognize you.

“There are certain patterns, there are certain color schemes ... you do your hair the right way, you wear the right clothes — people will still recognize you because everyone is insane about their favorite character,” Mac said.

When adhering to a budget, Mangu said it’s better to stick to cosplaying characters with less detail and cautions against buying cheap costumes from Amazon or Halloween stores because they sacrifice important details of complex character designs.

Mac said that cosplaying isn’t just clothes. Non-clothing items and cheap materials can also be used to create convincing costumes. Cardboard specifically can be used for almost anything and is easy to find. Making cheap and on-hand materials work is a valuable skill for constructing budget cosplays, although the process can be time consuming and difficult.

“I have these pair of elf shoes, I call them the ‘Santa’s Workshop 2000s,’” Mac said. “It would have been way easier to glue it together, but it just wasn’t working and it was pissing me off, so I sewed the foam together. It’s two-millimeter thick foam sheets from Michaels for 50 cents, and I cut them out in the shape of shoes and I sewed them together. It took me back-breaking hours, but they looked great and I didn’t have to go buy anything else for five bucks.”

For many cosplayers, the joy of dressing up is being recognized and



ALEX LAWLESS | MERCURY STAFF
Vinh Mac, an animation and games junior, cosplays as The Daycare Attendant, otherwise known as Sun and Moon, from the popular horror game Five Nights at Freddy's: Security Breach.

50 shades of PINK!

SP/N Gallery exhibit shows that pink is more than a girly color and displays how shades of pink evoke different feelings

PAOLA MARTINEZ
Life & Arts Editor

Fuchsia, coral, peach, bubblegum, magenta, blush — countless different shades of pink can be found in the SP/N Gallery's "PINK!" exhibition, which debuted Aug. 23. "PINK!" presents viewers with a dizzying array of pink artwork and performance, encouraging viewers to reconsider their feelings and presuppositions about the color by presenting new perspectives.

"PINK!" was curated by Diane Durant, associate professor of instruction at the Bass School of Arts and Humanities, who set out to broaden viewers' understanding of what pink can mean given different mediums and creative contexts. Durant said she reached out to a variety of artists who work with pink and asked about their thoughts and relationships to the color. The exhibition will host a curator talk Sept. 5 at 7:30 p.m. in the SP/N Gallery and will run until Sept. 5.

"Different shades of pink really ... can create different responses for a viewer," Durant said. "I want the viewer to come in and be wowed by the different ways pink is used, and the different reasons why pink is used."

The exhibit displays a diverse range of mediums including felting, sculpture, photography, performance, drawing, painting, ceramics and animation. Durant invited multiple artists she discovered by scouring through Instagram for creatives that prioritized pink in their artwork. These artists include UTD alums Jessica Fuentes and Brent Fields.

Fuentes, a 2004 alum with a degree in art and performance, is a photographer mostly working with film. Three photographic prints on aluminum Fuentes shot earlier this year are displayed in the "PINK!" exhibit: "Between Night and Day," "First Day of the New Year" and "Across Time and Space."

Fuentes said her art involves combining images taken at different times and locations, speaking to the idea of memory and past and present. "Across Time and Space" is a diptych, two related but distinct images, one of which depicts Fuentes' oldest daughter in a snowy, naturally blue-tinted image, and the other image is of her youngest daughter, the image stained pink after an accident in developing the film. Fuentes said the artwork pushed her to reconsider pink.

"Pink is not a color that I like," Fuentes said. "I think I'm kind of anti-pink, always have been my whole life. But with that diptych, my oldest daughter, I feel like she's a lot like me; she wasn't really a 'pink' girl. She wasn't into those traditional feminine roles. But my youngest daughter is that. That's just who she is. So, I think it's funny to have these two



Top left: The "PINK!" exhibit showcases various artworks using different mediums in the SP/N Gallery space, including sculptures, paintings and performances.



portraits of them that show a little bit of the differences between [them]. The big takeaway from the exhibition is you can't pigeonhole color. One thing can mean so many different things to different people [and] can be representative of many different things. It contains multitudes."

Fields, a 2023 alum with a degree in visual and performing arts, did a drag performance during the exhibition's opening night inspired by cult classic movie "Mean Girls" and the fashion doll Barbie. Fields took the stage as Marissah D'Amour Starr; they mixed acting and lip syncing into a satirical performance. Meghan Trainor's song "Me Too" played as Starr acts out scenes from "Mean Girls" as the cocky pink diva Regina George.

"I wanted them to enjoy [my performance]," Fields said. "I wanted something that they can enjoy, identify with or connect with in some sort of sense. And then my other biggest thing that I wanted people to take away from it was just to be inspired. I wanted people to see something that maybe they don't traditionally see often, but it would give them an inspiration."

Fields said their relationship to pink has evolved as they've grown older. They said they had always been conditioned to believe that pink is only a girls' color, but as they grew older, they began viewing it more neutrally.

"Pink is just a color that, for me, is bright, vibrant, happy," Fields said. "I also have a relationship to it, in a sense, because my grandmother's favorite color is pink and I'm very close to her. And pink is also an extension of red, which is



Bottom left: "a perfect flower (from the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked)" by Brenda Melgoza Ciaridello. Bottom right: One of three artworks by Cat Rigdon. Top right: Matthew Solon-Lee Weimer's "Pink Boys in The Field."



GREGORY BINU | MERCURY STAFF

my favorite color. My whole outlook on the color has changed to where I don't try to limit it to certain people [wearing pink]."

The idea for "PINK!" was born earlier this year when SP/N Gallery director Danielle Avram was talking to Durant about upcoming exhibitions, including a horror show. The conversation led Durant to conceptualize an exhibit completely opposite to a horror show, which she described as "something fruity, some-

thing sweet, something soft" — associations that immediately made her think of the color pink. As Durant began planning the exhibit, she reflected on what pink meant to her.

"In the curator's essay that I wrote, I talked about my relationship with pink and how important it even was for me to understand that pink doesn't just have to be feminine," Durant said.

Durant said she grew up as a tomboy, thinking of pink as "too girly," but her

perspective changed upon entering adulthood.

"I can see all the ways that pink is powerful and all the ways that pink can be used strategically to create nuance, especially in these artworks when pink becomes a major part of the work," Durant said. "It isn't just a color that's a highlight. It's not just incidental, it's very purposeful."

Esports' biggest championships come to Dallas

FNCS and Rocket League World Championships, each game's biggest tournament this year, offer star DFW players a home advantage

MAR OLOGBAN
Mercury Staff

The Rocket League World Championship and Fortnite Battle Royale Global Championship will bring the best players in the world to the DFW metroplex to compete for millions of dollars.

The Fortnite championship — also known as FNCS — and Rocket League championship will be held at Dickies Arena in Fort Worth for two weekends in September. A total of 148 players — 50 Fortnite competitive duos and 16 Rocket League trio teams — will come from 35 countries to compete in the two events for a combined prize pool of \$3 million. Esports fans can view the competition both in-person and online.

While FNCS draws international competitors, the reigning global champion, Cooper Smith, is a Texas native and will be playing in front of a home crowd. Smith first got into Fortnite the way many young gamers do.

"I started playing Fortnite around the age of 11," Smith said. "I remember all my friends playing in the sixth grade, and figured I'd give it a shot around the same time, so I started playing in early 2018."

Fortnite, even in its early years, was different from other battle royale games like Players Unknown Battlegrounds or H1Z1. It had more mechanics than just shooting. Fortnite involves building, landing, knowledge about different guns and their strengths, communicating with teammates and more



KAYLA WILLIAMS | COURTESY

Pictured: Jack Benton, known by his screen name "ApparentlyJack," with his Rocket League team, Gen.G Mobil1 Racing at the RCLS Spring Major 2023 Day Three in Boston.

— which drew in many players, both casual and professional.

"Fortnite was always more appealing to me in comparison to other shooters because of the diverse mechanics required in comparison to other shooter games," Smith said. "For instance, building, editing and the evolving mobility make it much more interesting and appealing to me and that's why I chose it instead of other games."

FNCS takes on a duo format instead of solos, trios or squads. In other formats, a player may choose different explicit classes or fall into a certain role while playing on a team. However, in Fortnite competitive, there are two roles: the "in-game leader" and the "fragger," a player who looks for kills.

"The Global Championship I won in Denmark, I was the IGL, however, I am currently a fragger for the duo I

am playing with this year," Smith said. "I can play both roles proficiently, so I don't really fall specifically into a single role."

Competitive Rocket League is typically locked to a 3v3 format, but it can be played in different modes just like Fortnite. Although the 3v3 format is the most popular, competitive players believe other formats of gameplay, such as 2v2 or 1v1, could be just as enter-

taining to play and watch. With the championships taking place in Texas, a home advantage is given to Jack Benton, screen name "ApparentlyJack" — a professional Rocket League player who moved from the UK to Dallas to further his competitive career.

"I'd say 3v3 is still my favorite game mode because it's what I've played professionally and put the most focus on in the last 4 years," Benton said. "There's no doubt in my mind that if 1v1 had the same level of tournaments and attention from Epic Games, it would be the most popular and exciting game mode, for both the fans and the players."

To spectators, competitive gaming may seem as easy as taking a seat in front of a PC and playing the game, but there is a lot more that goes on behind the scenes, such as players practicing for several hours a week and adopting a competitive and winning mindset during championships.

"We're very lucky — we play games for a living; [it's] not exactly a hard thing to do," Benton said. "However, because all of us want to be the best in the world, that mental strain it puts on you to constantly be working on it to try and get ahead of everyone else can be quite demanding, just like regular sports."

The FNCS will take place on the weekend of Sept. 7-8, while the Rocket League World Championship will have a live audience for the weekend of Sept. 13-15.

DFW traffic to become more decadent, depraved

Texas eliminates annual vehicular safety inspections as well as pragmatism and common sense with passage of HB 3297

PARTHA KULKARNI
Mercury Staff

Traffic: the textbook definition of damnation as it applies to modern American society. The utmost first-world, puerile complaint that entrenches our day-to-day lives. The only thing that could make it worse is the elimination of safety inspections for vehicles, which would cause a multitude of car crashes, deaths and ultimately more traffic under the guise of saving the Texan public time and money — which is exactly what the Texas legislature did.

HB 3297 eliminates safety inspections for vehicles, instead replacing them with an annual \$7.50 fee, or a one-time \$16.75 fee if your vehicle has not been previously registered. Signed June 2023, HB 3297 will take effect Jan. 1, 2025. That means when the fall 2024 semester comes to a close, the roads around UTD are going to transform into a rueful nightmare fueled by traffic-related mischief of Bradbury-esque proportions with more accidents and higher insurance rates for all.

That is not to say the roads around UTD are currently in pristine condition and that everyone here is holding hands, singing bhajans and doing the Irish jig. In fact, Dallas ranked sixth in Forbes’ 2024 list of the top 10 cities with worst drivers. It also ranked third in the nation for fatal drunk driver accidents at 6.25 per 100,000 city residents, and fourth for fatal accidents involving speeding at 5.69 per 100,000 city residents. That does not mean we should ban cars and force everyone to toil and suffer on foot, but there has to be at least a modicum of regulation — sane regulation — for transportation.

It is quite comical that, even though



MADABUCHI OKORO | MERCURY STAFF

Texas is removing vehicle safety inspections, it will still require the most-populated counties to appear annually for an emissions test, in which both Dallas and Collin County are included, so at least students can look forward to that even when they remove general safety inspections. Hooray. It is also quite comical that, when HB 3297 was open to public testimony in the Texas Senate in May 2023, opponents outnumbered supporters 16 to 5. However, the bill passed the Texas House 109-32 and Texas Senate 20-11. A government that is out-of-touch with the public which it represents should not be fit to exert control over said public. I know this might sound radical, iconoclastic even, but bear with me.

The counterargument against what

I, and let’s be real, most of the public, am insisting is that HB 3297 will reduce costs and save time, eliminating supposedly “irrelevant” safety inspections. That is what Mayes Middleton, the state senator for Galveston, said on the subject — but upon closer inspection, his argument has more holes than a Connect 4 board made out of Swiss cheese.

No, it is not going to reduce costs. Current safety vehicle inspections, both one-year and two-year, run at \$7.00 per vehicle, 50 cents less than the proposed 2025 rates. As for insurance, the end of state inspections might not directly cause an increase in rates, but will most likely lead to more crashes. A 2018 study done by UT Austin demonstrated that if there are more crashes, there are more insurance claims, which will cause the rates

to go up. And yes, that affects you, fellow UTD student, even if you’ve had a perfect driving record, because location affects your insurance rates.

No, it is not going to save time either. A car inspection in Texas can take as little as fifteen minutes, or up to an hour if you’re really clueless about your vehicle, and you only have to do it once a year. Compare one hour per year to potentially one week in the hospital because your car had bald tires or a faulty brake system. You might think this is an over-exaggeration, but know this potential reality could always happen to you. And with HB 3297, that potential reality is going to have a much higher chance of coming true. Can you, a UTD student, afford to spend a week or month in the hospital as opposed to taking exams or

studying or chatting with schoolmates? I sure can’t.

Finally, safety inspections are not irrelevant. Texas’ required equipment for motor vehicles is quite thorough -- specifying brakes, lights, fuel caps, even license plates. These guys have everything covered. Inspections are not just some bloke flashing a light he got from the corner drugstore; the equipment list has a real, lasting effect and real safety is being ensured.

It is no surprise that four-fifths of UTD students commute to campus and will be harmed by these changes. Cripes, students have been complaining about DFW-area transport as far back as 2004! We already groan and moan about how terrible X professor is or why Y assignment is a crime against humanity. Do we need more complaints? Is anybody going to advocate for that? I’m not and you shouldn’t either.

So, what is the solution for this catastrophe? Nothing. Absolutely, positively, without a doubt nothing. There are powerful forces outside our control — some of which are foolish and bizarre — but I still believe we can make our own miracles. Keep springing out of bed every morning, brushing your teeth, snoozing through class, kvetching about your daily shortcomings, but also taking your vehicle in for its annual inspection. It is not required to take your vehicle in for inspection anymore, but it is not illegal either. It is certainly less hassle, and more effective, than writing death threats to Gov. Greg Abbott or moving out of the state. We might have less faith in DFW traffic and safe drivers, but by continuing to prioritize our safety, we can keep it from becoming even more decadent and depraved.

Editor’s Desk: Just 'Business decisions'

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
Editor-in-Chief

The Mercury takes pride in its reporting and journalism and constantly seeks out new opportunities to develop our skills. We collaborate with and learn from local journalists, including everyone from independent reporters to groups like the *Dallas Morning News*, and regularly attend student journalism conferences to connect with other student publications, advisers and mentors. But as of Aug. 23, UTD’s Director of Student Media Lydia Lum has prohibited *The Mercury* from attending any future journalism conferences, calling it a “business decision.”

Lum said her decision was motivated by *The Mercury*’s management team not allowing her to attend all private meetings over the summer, a time in which *The Mercury* operates asynchronously because of staff and management’s schedules. Lum said she felt she had been denied access to meetings, making it difficult for her to know what the management team needs educationally. Unless we grant her — an employee of UTD administration — full access to every meeting *The Mercury* holds, Lum said she is left with no option but to prohibit *The Mercury* from attending conferences and award ceremonies. Lum’s ultimatum, designed to give her heightened oversight and reviewing powers, goes against *The Mercury*’s commitment to editorial independence and the integrity of student press.

The first sentence of *The Mercury*’s mission statement is: “*The Mercury* is an award-winning, editorially independent news publication that focuses on UTD, its people and its surrounding communities.” A crucial part of this statement is our commitment to being “editorially independent.” As a student-run publication, everything *The Mercury* creates is made by current UTD undergraduate and graduate

students, and decisions about coverage, distribution and internal operations are made by the students themselves — not outside administrators. Part of editorial independence includes resisting prior review; that is, allowing administrators, sources and other overseers to view or change articles prior to their publication. Banning prior review protects both the independence of *The Mercury*’s content from outside intervention and lessens the pressure on Student Media in cases where *The Mercury* publishes something UTD’s administration dislikes — it is difficult to punish the Director of Student Media for a bold newspaper team when the director has no say over its content. The director has historically had no ability to unilaterally review or censor our material beforehand. Allowing the director to view our content and influence our meetings prior to publication, as Lum desires, entails a new form of administrative censorship against *The Mercury*.

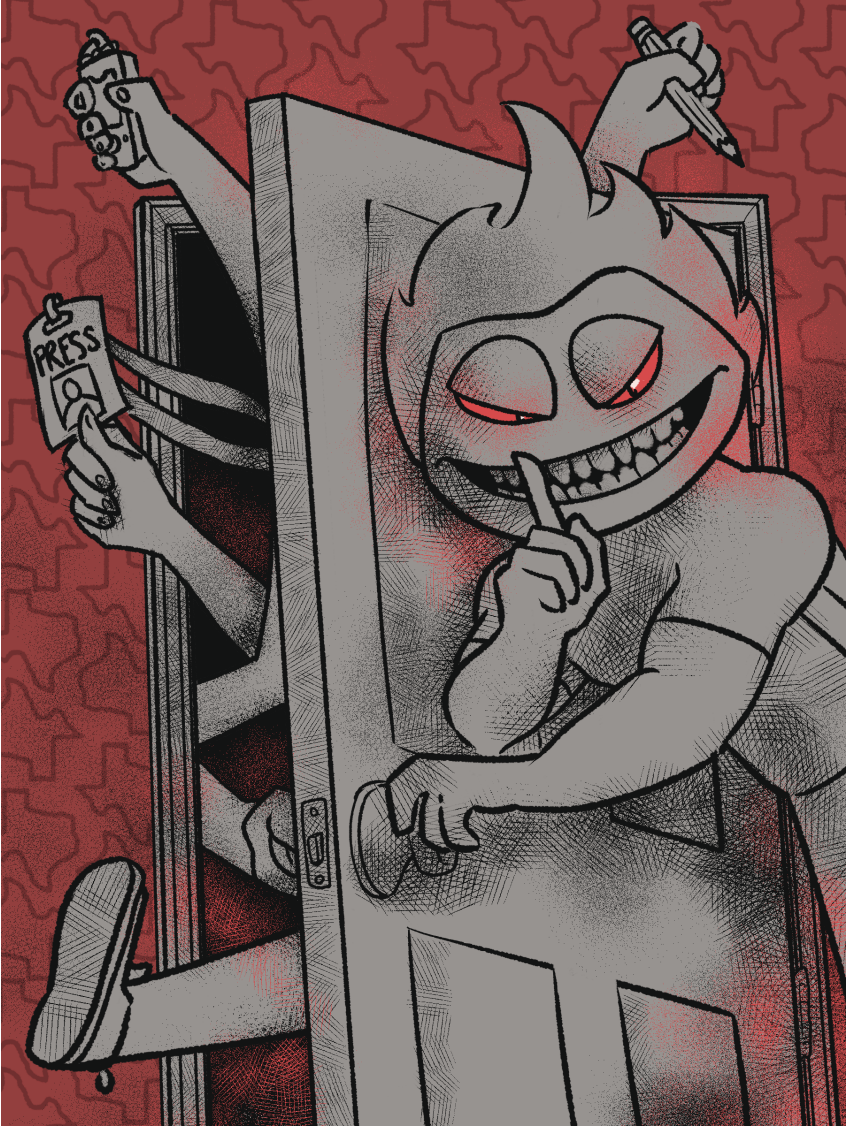
What Lum euphemistically calls a “business decision” is her prohibiting *The Mercury* from attending conferences held by the national collegiate journalism associations that *The Mercury* pays to be a part of: the Associated Collegiate Press and the College Media Association. ACP and CMA provide workshops, seminars and other learning opportunities in addition to organizing college media awards. Lum justified this by saying if she cannot sit in on every meeting, then she does not know which management members to send to conferences, and if she cannot offer unsolicited advice, she assumes *The Mercury*’s management team believes they have no more learning and growing left to do. This reasoning is paper-thin. The prohibition is clearly punitive.

Withholding our conferences falls in line with other punitive measures ad-

ministration has taken against *The Mercury* in recent months. *The Mercury*’s summer was full of exciting events such as, the demotion of our former director Jonathan Stewart; his replacement with Senior Director of Marketing and Student Media Jenni Hufferberger as interim director until Lum was hired; late staff payments; and now a new mandate from Lum wanting unlimited access to not only our staff meetings, but also our confidential editorial and management meetings. This is a frightening deviation from the years of precedent, in which the director offered advice when solicited and critiqued *The Mercury*’s content after publication, not beforehand.

The Foundation of Individual Rights and Expression is a non-profit civil liberties organization that outlines seven key warning signs for student press censorship: defunding and derecognition; investigations; theft and destruction; censorship demands; prior review; pressure on advisers; and suppressive media relations policies. With these criteria, FIRE found that between 2021 and 2022, “60% of student newspapers at four-year public institutions faced some form of censorship.”

In 2024 alone, UTD has checked off four of the seven warning signs. Regarding censorship, UTD removed hundreds of copies of the March 18 issue from Mercury kiosks inside the Student Union and Student Media administrators prohibited *The Mercury* from submitting its May 20 issue to the ACP Pacemaker competition. Regarding pressure against advisers, the demotion of Stewart mere days after the publication of the May 20 issue is perhaps one of the most extreme forms of pressure which can be exerted. Regarding suppressive media policy, not only have higher ups in UTD administration refused to speak with *The Mercury* unless a questions list is provided through the Office of Communications, but even groups like the



GRACE COWGER | MERCURY STAFF

Comet Cupboard have enforced gag orders on their staff to keep them from talking to *The Mercury*. And now, the fall semester starts off strong with ultimatums being made calling for prior review. It is deeply unfortunate our own adviser wishes to threaten *The Mercury* when we already face opposition from campus administrators.

The Mercury reaffirms its commitment to providing students with editorially independent journalism and hopes Lum is willing to cooperate with

the students of Student Media instead of throwing out hostile ultimatums. We have offered Lum a plethora of compromises which maintain our editorial independence while keeping her informed about operations, plans and educational needs. However, if Lum continues pushing for prior review, *The Mercury* will lobby the Student Media Operating Board to amend the Student Media bylaws to better protect independent journalism on campus.

Letter to the Editor: In response to the editor’s disclaimer on Aug. 19 LTTE

Disclaimer: Mercury policy prohibits censorship as a requirement for publication. Editors provide suggestions on opinion editorials and letters to the editor, which the author can choose to implement. The onus falls upon the author to provide evidence and sourcing for all claims made within an opinion. Opinions with insufficient facts or sourcing can implicate The Mercury for defamation and libel, and thus may run with

disclaimers per Mercury policy. Helen Roth has consented to the complete email chain between her and The Mercury being published, which can be found on The Mercury’s website.

To the Editor,

As a longtime member of the UTD community with experience as a professional news reporter, I was perplexed by the disclaimer on the

August 19 Letter to the Editor: Campus Antisemitism. I found Mr. Steinberg’s opinion piece regarding the October 7th vile massacre committed by Hamas terrorists, the aftermath, and its influence on campus life to be newsworthy and accurate. Could you please identify exactly what the editorial staff considers factual errors in his opinion piece? Also, in the spirit of full transparency, could you please

publish *The Mercury*’s journalistic standards?

The Student Media department has recently added professional staff. Perhaps we can look forward to enhanced journalistic standards, including prohibiting the editorial staff from censoring opinion pieces as a condition of publication, as happened before the acceptance of Mr. Steinberg’s letter.

The UTD student body is not monolithic, and as student fees pay for *The Mercury*, our students deserve unbiased news and full transparency.

Sincerely,
Helen K. Roth
The University of Texas at Dallas
800 W. Campbell Road
Richardson, Texas 75080
<https://www.utdallas.edu/>



Amid the body horror and alien gore, “Alien: Romulus” offers a new perspective on what AI can do for us ... and to us

PAOLA MARTINEZ
Life & Arts Editor

Discussions about artificial intelligence’s role in our society are becoming inescapable as we grow more accustomed to its presence. The AI doomers, what I like to call those who fear the death of humanity thanks to highly intelligent and superior computerized robots, always make the same points about the harm that AI can do. However, AI isn’t a threat to humanity — we are. “Alien: Romulus,” the ninth film in the “Alien” franchise, encapsulates our sinister misuse of AI for personal gain and corporate interests at the expense of others.

“Alien: Romulus” follows a group of young space colonists in search of a better life. The group consists of siblings Rain and Andy alongside Tyler, Kay, Navarro and Bjorn. They detect an abandoned space station and scavenge it for fuel to get to the planet Yvaga. As they explore the abandoned space station, they encounter threatening life-forms on the ship, and it is Andy’s job to take care of them.

Andy, unlike the rest of the group,

is not human. He is a synthetic human — think Arnold Schwarzenegger’s “The Terminator.” Essentially, he is AI programmed by Rain’s dad as a surrogate brother for her. He is coded to protect her at all costs, even when Rain hides the truth from him: that Andy would not be able to join his sister in Yvaga because the planet does not let synthetics in. Rain uses Andy, her AI-humanoid brother, for her personal gain, inviting him solely because of his ability to override the abandoned space station’s computer security system even if it means leaving him behind.

Although Andy is an android, he expresses some semblance of human emotion. He recognizes that the group is using him, but because it is encoded in him to protect Rain and by extension her friend group, Andy pushes away any confusion about how he must feel about Rain’s betrayal by omission. A trope uncommon in the AI genre, Andy is an older AI model — he is simple-minded and primitive

in the tasks he can do, and for a robot, he is weak. And yet his furrowed brows, the sheepish smirk, the avoidant eyes all point to an AI that can feel. He was taught to feel for Rain at his own expense. In the Andy-Rain sibling relationship, Rain gains a surrogate brother and protector. Andy gets nothing.

Andy’s character shows the intelligence of artificial intelligence; it can

“ He was taught to feel for Rain at his own expense. In the Andy-Rain sibling relationship, Rain gains a surrogate brother and protector. Andy gets nothing. ”

learn the one thing that people fear the most — human emotions. We all know how severely emotions can overtake the logical mind: how anger can make us violent and irrational, or how sadness can make us see the

world blue. On the other hand, emotions like joy, excitement and love can make us feel elated, like we’re on top of the world. This is what makes us so afraid of the intelligence of AI, and the space colonists of “Alien: Romulus” also fear that. Unfortunately for them, their fear rings true.

Aboard the abandoned space station, the colonists meet Rook, a synthetic human and science officer left behind by the station’s crew. Although Andy was made to be a protector and prioritize Rain’s best interest, his code changes as Rain inserts Rook’s chip so Andy can have access to a restricted area of the station. Unlike Andy, Rook is a newer AI model coded to do what’s best for the Weyland-Yutani Corporation — a corporation willing to sacrifice humanity for monetary gain. Rook is a robot void of any emotion. Everything is done in the interest of the company, not humankind.

Andy goes from a timid and gentle android to an emotionless machine.

Even though he was coded to protect Rain, Rain would often stick up for Andy and protect him. With the introduction of Rook’s chip, Andy becomes like Rook.

This absence of emotion makes Andy heartless, disregarding the safety of Rain’s friends and ultimately the safety of Rain, too. The threat the characters face doesn’t come from Andy’s artificial ability to register emotion, but instead it comes from the lack of true emotion in Rook, a danger we will have to contend with as AI becomes more indispensable in our world.

Artificial intelligence is created and embedded by human hands, meaning we are in control of what it can do. AI is only dangerous if we teach it to prioritize corporate interests instead of humanitarian ones, or if we create it without care and respect for human emotions. Contrary to those who fear AI becoming “too humanlike” because they think humanness will corrupt them, it is human sentimentality and care that will redeem them.

Manny Jacinto deserves better than a canceled show

People of color need film and TV narratives that don’t hinge on or seek justification from white characters

KAVYA RACHEETI
Opinion Editor

Despite my loyalty to the “Star Wars” franchise, I’ve never really understood the fanfare for Sith Lords. Anakin Skywalker is a genocidal maniac. Kylo Ren is a wannabe of the aforementioned genocidal maniac. The other ones are grotesque to look at. That is, until I saw Manny Jacinto’s performance in “The Acolyte.” The show and Jacinto’s performance was incredibly compelling — and canceled all too soon. The cancellation seems to be symptomatic of Hollywood’s aversion to characters with no proximity to whiteness, which ruins nonwhite narratives and cripples nonwhite creatives’ work.

Jacinto’s character Qimir’s plot-twist Sith reveal is nothing short of delicious. Introduced as “The Stranger,” Jacinto gives the same goofy, fun-loving energy as his former role as Jason Mendoza in the sitcom “The Good Place,” and the audience is meant to assume he is a pathetically hilarious character that miraculously survives every episode. This lighthearted approach to the character makes the contrast of the reveal so much sharper and infinitely more satisfying — all the while ensuring that Jacinto’s character is still an enjoyable presence. Even though he effortlessly slashes through a fleet of Jedi, some of whom the audience had grown to care for, it becomes increasingly difficult to root against him. For the first time while watching “Star Wars,” I wanted to see the bad guy win. The icing on the cake is when he reveals himself to the protagonist Osha, played by Amandla Stenberg, and calls out to her in a chilling voice. He holds her with The Force and asks, “You really didn’t know it was me? Not even deep

down?” The feeling of hopelessness that Osha feels in that moment from watching most of her friends be ruthlessly slaughtered by someone she thought she could trust is palpable. The scene is terrifying — in that moment, Jacinto is terrifying. And as I watched this unfold on my laptop, I couldn’t help but think: Why don’t I see more of this guy? He should be in every single movie and TV show until he retires. Where is the Manny Jacinto hype?

Imagine my surprise when Disney announces the show’s cancellation. On Jacinto’s birthday, no less. This

“ Nonwhite women’s beauty and desirability seemingly cannot be celebrated unless a white person is involved. ”

isn’t the first time Jacinto has been snubbed: In “Top Gun: Maverick,” all of Jacinto’s character Fritz’s lines were cut and his screen-time was left essentially non-existent. The “Top Gun” series has established itself as an emblem of American masculinity: Tom Cruise does something insane in a jet, there is a touching scene of male camaraderie. “Top Gun” has also established itself as very white. When I think of the star players of the latest installment, “Top Gun: Maverick,” I think of Miles Teller, Glen Powell or even Lewis Pullman. Why don’t I, and most of the audience who saw the film, think of Jacinto? Why can’t an Asian man be a part of this film’s golden-cast Americana aes-

thetic? These unanswered questions set up the framework for a gutting reality that even Jacinto admits to: “People of color have to create narratives for themselves.”

However, even when people of color are the focus of a major television show or film and are thus “creating their own narratives,” there is always a backdrop or supplement of whiteness. Take the second season of “Bridgerton.” Kate and Edwina Sharma, the season’s two new additions, are treated as deserving of affection and desire, a rarity for Indian characters within Western film and television, especially those of darker skin. However, nonwhite women’s beauty and desirability seemingly cannot be celebrated unless a white person is involved. Kate and Edwina are the love interests of the white Anthony Bridgerton. Interracial relationships are to be lauded and there is nothing inherently wrong with people of color dating white people, but there is a strange standard for how people of color’s worth is tied to whiteness in Western media. Later this month on Broadway, Rachel Zegler, who is Latina, and Kit Connor, who is white, will play Romeo and Juliet in Sam Gold’s iteration of the Shakespeare classic. Months prior, it was Tom Holland and Francesca Amewudah-Rivers in a grungier West End revival. Even Jacinto has played the quasi-perfect nonwhite love interest for a white protagonist.

It is this aversion to portraying interracial couples that do not involve white people that has led to the downfall of “The Acolyte.” The romantic tension between Qimir and Osha is so tangible, addicting even, that it rivals iconic “Star Wars” romances like Anakin and Padme. So much so that, in true “Twisters” fashion, they cut out a

kiss scene between the two of them. stories that are meant for them. So,



ANIKA SULTANA | GRAPHICS EDITOR

But because of internet outrage over “Star Wars” being infected by “woke ideology” — which is really just people of color existing in a multitude — the show had low viewership and was canceled.

We are often afraid of what we do not understand, and thus, what we cannot see. If art serves one purpose, it is to reflect the human condition. Having narratives like “Bridgerton’s” are great for interracial couples that involve white people, but other narratives must exist for people of color who choose to date other people of color. People of color should, and deserve to, have

Jacinto, I hope you do get to play the unapologetically desirable lead in a romance film with another person of color. Not just for your sake, but for mine.

Opinions expressed in The Mercury are those of the editor or of the writer of the article and are not necessarily those of the university administration, the Board of Regents of The University of Texas System, or of the operating board of the newspaper.

WE NEED MORE FREAKS BEHIND THE CAMERA



AASHIKA KISHORE | MERCURY STAFF

Mainstream cinema doesn't challenge anymore. Or, a defense of *Poor Things*, and every other movie that dared to be different.

UNNATHI PRAKASH
Mercury Staff

A razor slices across an eyeball. Thin clouds move through the moon; jellied insides spilling out of a lamb's eye. When the world needed weird movies most — they disappeared.

“Un Chien Andalou” has a striking opening scene that heralds an infinitely more confusing short film. Co-created by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, painter of the iconic melting clocks, “Un Chien Andalou” is a warm favorite of a brand of cinephile who'll claim “you don't get it!” when you are confused about a five-hour indie film that claims to be about famine but instead shows only a rustling paper bag with cuts to a screaming woman woven throughout. Even after a century since its 1929 release, the narrative of “Un Chien Andalou” is incomprehensible; perhaps even more so because of the established film grammar that we have grown up in and understand intuitively. The half-hour film is full of nonsensical plots only loosely tied together through the same actors in scenes. It's tense, for reasons we can't understand. It calls upon its viewer to create their own meaning, to abandon superficiality and discover what recent movies have been

failing to deliver: a sense of imagination and wonder.

Movies today are largely adaptations of novels, like “It Ends With Us” or other intellectual properties like games, such as “Borderlands,” sequels like “Inside Out 2” or remakes like “Mean Girls.” When original films are few and far between, riffing off existing media guarantees an audiences' time spent will at least be mildly entertaining. Original films often suffer from cheesy dialogue and uninspired romance, making sequels all the more appealing. Within Hollywood's recent memory, only a few wide-release films have been given free rein, like “Everything Everywhere All At Once,” “The Green Knight” and “Poor Things.” But not all hope is lost — production company A24 has excelled in facilitating and marketing arthouse-style films in the cultural zeitgeist, and Emma Stone's win of a 2024 Academy Award is a potential sign for a resurgence in esoteric cinema.

“Poor Things” by Yorgos Lanthimos is a thrilling 2 hours and 21 minutes, consistently keeping the

viewer on their toes through ridiculous shots and outrageous dialogue, following Emma Stone's Frankensteinian character, Bella Baxter, as she discovers freedom of her body and mind, sex work, socialism, cruise ship horrors and the secrets behind turning men into goats. Bella's naiveté allows her to challenge norms that many of us have accepted as tragic facts of life — for instance,

“Poor Things” may be controversial, but it's provided us a much-needed opportunity to discuss the portrayal of varying sexual appetites, the wondrous experience of being human and whether fish-eye lens shots actually serve the narrative.

the stigmatization of sex work, labor abuses, misogyny — while it fools the men around her into thinking they can control her. “Poor Things” may be controversial, but it's provided us a much-needed opportunity to discuss the portrayal of varying sexual appetites, the wondrous experience of being human and whether

fish-eye lens shots actually serve the narrative.

Arguably, though sex is steeped within “Poor Things,” it's not a sexy movie. “Challengers,” directed by Luca Guadagnino, definitely is. The movie starts with a tennis rally, tense and tightly paced, setting up the love triangle within the first few minutes. Zendaya's character Tashi Donaldson is in control, dangling herself like bait in front of her husband Art, played by Mike Faist, and ex-boyfriend Patrick, played by Josh O'Connor, to get them to play a “good fucking game of tennis.” Guadagnino is a master of attraction on camera, and “Challengers” hurtles through a decade and change of the nastiest, most codependent love triangle known to cinema. The film's conclusion is left intentionally vague, just barely resolving loose ends but creating, in a sense, the loosest end of them all by suggesting that Tashi, Art and Patrick can reconcile. In an interview with TODAY, Guadagnino wryly suggested the final collision of all three characters was a return to their roots: “They go back to the

hotel room.”

Weird movies are essential to society. As capitalism tramples over artistic pursuits, like the acquisition, and subsequent dismantling of Blue Sky by Disney, movies that challenge the norm become only more necessary. Tropes we take for granted, like every action movie needing a villain, are upended by films like “Everything Everywhere All At Once.” “Everything Everywhere All At Once” oozes personality, its visual effects bringing back the magic of physical VFX on sets. It's an action film with no villain, the greatest transgression of its genre: the big bad turns out to be the intangible concept of generational trauma. The love of filmmaking is evident in every scene; A necessary reminder, in the middle of Marvel movie #58 and Disney #261, of why we want to visit the cinema. It is not to see yet another talking animal making vague allegories toward discrimination, but to challenge our perceptions of the world and watch art that makes us light up inside. “Everything Everywhere All At Once,” “Challengers,” “Poor Things” and other films within this realm of oddities ask us all to be a little weirder.

Olympics cyber harassment underscores misogyny

Outrage and false allegations against Olympic boxer Imane Khelif highlight issues of misogyny in international sports

SAMHITHA PALLA
Mercury Staff

What happens when an athlete is so good at a sport that they are accused of lying about their sex? Algerian boxer Imane Khelif faced accusations of being a man after her win against Italian boxer Angela Carini in the 2024 Summer Olympics, because she wasn't a conventionally attractive, white woman.

Following her gold medal victory in the women's welterweight category of women's boxing, Khelif has officially filed a lawsuit against the transphobic vitriol and abuse she experienced in the 2024 Summer Olympics. Khelif should not have experienced such abuse while competing in boxing. The notion that Khelif would not have experienced this harassment if she had been conventionally attractive, or a white-passing woman, is insulting to Khelif and every female athlete. The idea that female athletes should prioritize being conventionally attractive over training to become the best in their respective sport is degrading.

Unfortunately, this incident was not the first time Khelif was pushed into the public eye because of derogatory attacks against her femininity. During the Women's World Boxing Championship in March 2023, the International Boxing Association disqualified Khelif and Chinese Taipei boxer Lin Yu Ting for failing to meet the gender identity test. The IBA officials have explained the boxers underwent chromosome tests to determine their testosterone levels. The chromosome tests measure the level of testosterone found per liter of blood but are unable to paint a fair and accurate picture of an athlete's sex. Athletic organizations fail to understand that females can have higher or lower levels of testosterone in their body because of genetic and environmental factors, which should not be used to determine an athlete's biological sex. These tests are not only inaccurate, but



also strengthen the misogynistic remarks cisgender female athletes face. As a result, cisgender female athletes whose tests depict higher levels of testosterone face significant harassment and bullying and accusations of being male. Despite the false allegations regarding Khelif's gender — which the

IBA even failed to prove by not producing the test results at a conference intended to explain the reasons for the boxers' disqualification — the International Olympic Committee cleared her for the Paris games and continued to support them on and off screen.

The current controversy began following Khelif's victory over Carini. Carini withdrew from the fight within 46 seconds and refused to shake Khelif's hand, a stark deviation from good sportsmanship. Carini said that she had “never been hit so hard in [her] life.” The result of the match has

led to a public discussion regarding Khelif's eligibility as a female boxer and placed a greater emphasis on her IBA ban in 2023. The online harassment rapidly escalated when notable public figures, such as author J.K. Rowling and billionaire Elon Musk implied Khelif is biologically male and does not belong in women's sports on their respective social media accounts, which garnered hundreds of millions of views. Carini, however, has since apologized and stated that she respects the IOC's support of Khelif competing in women's boxing.

Khelif's situation expands on the dangers of allowing false rumors to influence public opinion and sports governance. Her story is unfortunately not the first incident that sparked debate over an athlete's gender. Several well-known female athletes such as Serena Williams, known as one of the greatest tennis players of all time, have also had to stand up against critics and those making false allegations about their biological sex. These critics are unable to understand that women, trans or otherwise, are simply pursuing their goals through sheer hard work and determination. Women should not have to spend time addressing critics simply for not representing an ideal feminine body or conventional attractiveness.

As the legal proceedings unfold, Khelif continues to maintain her courageous stance. This is not only her personal fight against cyberbullying, but also a revolution that can change the landscape of women's sports. The case could become a landmark moment in the ongoing conversation about gender, identity and fairness in athletics. The case can prove that an athlete's strength is not determined by conventional female or male characteristics. In doing so, athletes can focus on becoming champions in their sport and forgo the trauma of having the world calling them too masculine or feminine.

YIYI DING | MERCURY STAFF

BENSON'S RESIGNATION LEAVES BITTER LEGACY

Richard Benson steps down from his presidential role, leaving students to reflect on his actions and what he leaves behind

Richard Benson announced his departure from his position as UTD's fifth president Aug. 26, saying in his resignation letter, "Reflecting on all that has been accomplished over the last eight years, and all that has been set in motion, I feel that this is a good time to pass the leadership of UT Dallas to a new president." As he steps down, we too reflect on his actions and the kind of president he was. Benson will leave a swath of angry, hurt and disappointed students and faculty behind. Under Benson's recent leadership, major incidents such as the Spirit Rocks' removal and as well as the violent raid of the Gaza Liberation Plaza have left a permanent stain both on Benson's legacy and that of UTD as a whole.

Benson's actions this past year betray little regard for Comets' wellbeing. His rapid downward spiral began with blatant disregard for the student body's will as expressed through Student Government's April 2024 divestment resolution. Benson did not simply ignore the resolution, but wrote a letter discrediting and disparaging it. But Benson's hypocrisy and opposition to student will are nothing new. In fall 2023, student protests and Spirit Rock art supporting divestment and Palestine swept campus. Benson said in a schoolwide email Oct. 16, "In the face of this cruelty [the Oct. 7 attacks], I have also felt pride in what has been happening at UT Dallas ... Students are conversing about their differences; they are gathering donations and peacefully protesting; they are shaking hands. There have been no reports of violence, nor have any events been interrupted." This pride would be quickly curtailed — on Nov. 20, UTD administration removed the Spirit Rocks without warning just as Thanksgiving break had begun, citing "extended political discourse."

The Spirit Rocks' removal showed how comfortable Benson and his administration felt silencing student expression. It also showed students that instead of Benson addressing the root of the problem — the growing tension



Richardson police in riot gear stand amid a crowd of students during May 1, the first time state troopers and riot police had ever been called in to arrest students. UTD administration called in police to dismantle and raid a peaceful student protest.

between students — he chose the superficial solution of completely taking away students' freedom of expression on campus. A long-standing bastion of creativity students had used for 15 years to air grievances, announce events or celebrate accomplishments is now gone because the student voice differed from the opinions of UTD administration. Despite a collective push from the student body to "bring our rocks back," Benson chose to shut his blinds and not listen.

Benson, once again, silenced students by destroying the "Gaza Liberation Plaza" encampment constructed May 1. Because of the Spirit Rocks' removal, tensions heightened between administration and students as several student activists called for UTD to divest from weapons manufacturers like Lockheed Martin and Raytheon that contribute to the genocide in Palestine.

Students took to the Chess Plaza, renaming it "Gaza Liberation Plaza" and setting up an encampment to get the Benson administration to listen to their

“[Benson] does not stand with students and their values and wants — he stands with those that will bring him more money.”

demands. They had a right to protest and did so peacefully. However, Benson's administration was so appalled by students learning, socializing and protesting together that it called state troopers and riot police equipped with guns, grenade launchers and snipers to

storm the "Gaza Liberation Plaza" and arrest those in and near the encampment. To justify police action, Benson called the encampment "trespassing" — a thinly-veiled excuse when similar, apolitical encampments have gone unobstructed when companies occupy the entire Chess Plaza for their promotional work or when fraternities and sororities occupy the Plinth.

The harrowing effects of May 1 do not end there. Arrested students and faculty are only permitted to step on campus for class, work or "related activities," terms left vague and undefined. Furthermore, the nine arrested students, two of which graduated, are now being punished with denial of degree and deferred suspension.

It is through Benson's actions that students see what kind of leader he truly is. He does not stand with students and their values and wants — he

stands with those that will bring him more money. When students and faculty were pushed to the ground, kicked, handcuffed at their wrists and ankles and shoved into hot vans by five different police forces, Benson was attending a fundraising meeting with real estate billionaire and Nazi memorabilia collector Harlan Crow. He prioritizes optics over student will, writing letters and removing platforms of expression the second UTD might look bad. Benson's claimed appreciation of the UTD community will never be more than an empty statement — not when his own students and faculty feel hurt and disrespected by his administration's actions. No amount of multimillion-dollar arts complexes or construction projects can neutralize the human suffering Benson has caused, allowed or — most sickeningly — downplayed.

A president's role is to serve the population and uplift those they preside over. UTD's recent actions under Benson's direction beg the question: How can you fairly serve the student population when unfairly punishing a group of students for their political views? When the campus majority speaks and the president refuses to listen, can he be considered loyal to his community or to alternate interests that line his pockets?

Although Benson is resigning, he will "continue his service" as president until a new successor is ready to inherit the position. In the months he has left, we implore Benson to start listening to student and faculty voices and do right by his constituents. If UTD is as great as Benson likes to brag about, with its highly knowledgeable graduates, a campus with record levels of research activity and community engagement, then we expect Benson to treat the people who make UTD great — its students, staff and faculty — with respect. He can start by heeding their concerns: divesting from weapons companies, dropping legal action against arrested students and staff, reinstating the Spirit Rocks and making campus a safe place for free expression.


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